

CASA Child Advocates of Montgomery County / Leadership Montgomery County Executive Summary for 2020/2021 Team Projects

About Us: CASA Child Advocates of Montgomery County

- Located in Conroe: we serve all children in the foster care system in Montgomery County. The children have been removed from homes in Montgomery County, and are under the jurisdiction of the Montgomery County Court system (the parents report to CPS and to the court in Montgomery County). However, the children could be placed all over the greater Houston area, and even out-of-state.
- Founded in 1991
- Paid staff: 20
- Mission: to provide and promote court-appointed volunteer advocacy so that every abused and neglected child can have the opportunity to thrive in a safe, nurturing permanent home
- Vision: a concerned community where abuse and neglect is not tolerated and every child has the right to a safe, secure, enriching childhood

Potential Project Descriptions

Option 1: “Game of Life” for teens in foster care

Last summer we did a “Game of Life” with teens in foster care. We planned and carried out a day for the teens in which they could come in and learn about “real-life” scenarios, such as applying for Community College, cooking a simple meal, changing the oil in a car. These youth, particularly those who live in Residential Treatment Centers (RTCs) often miss the real-life experiences they would get growing up with parents devoted to their growth and education.

There are currently about 90 teens in foster care who are under the jurisdiction of Montgomery County. However, the foster homes and particularly the RTCs have youth who are under the jurisdiction of surrounding counties, but who are living in the same RTCs. When inviting youth who live in an RTC, we generally need to invite all the residents in the age group. Last year we had close to 100 youth attending, plus connected foster parents, RTC staff, CASA staff, and volunteers. This event was held at a local church.

This is a massive task of organization and community involvement, and has a lot of potential for innovation and growth—as well as being potentially life-changing for the teens. We were unable to do it this summer for obvious reasons. It is unclear at this time whether we will be able to have a large in-person gathering next summer. We would like for an LMC team to plan a similar event for the youth in a way that could be carried out safely, such as a virtual, or drive-by (or whatever your creative team can come up with!) event. You would be free to grow the event in ways you create, use the same or different vendors, make significant changes to the event (we would provide historic context, but nothing has to be the same!), and even to re-name the event if the team prefers. What we want is a day or package of “normal life experiences” for about a hundred youth in foster care in our area—a fun and practical experience that can be carried out whether or not gathering in person is safe next spring.

Organizations who attended last year to present sessions for the youth included (among many others):

- Cadence Bank to teach basic budgeting
- Milstead Auto to teach how to change oil in a car
- Lone Star to talk about vocational programs
- Montgomery County Food bank, to cook a simple meal
- Helping Paws, with pet therapy dogs
- Job Corps, to teach basic job-hunting skills

Timing: We held the initial event during the summer break. However, this “Game of Life” event could be held during the spring break time framework, and that would actually work out better with your LMC timing.

CASA Project Liaison: Melissa Anderson, Case Supervisor/Project Manager: Older Kids

Projected Cost: The cost of the past event included a t-shirt for each youth attendee, breakfast and lunch, and attention toys for tables, for a total cost of \$3,500. Everything else was donated. The cost for this event will be dependent on what the team plans, and we encourage you to use your imaginations!

Community Benefit: will help prepare youth currently in foster care for integration into the community, into adult living

Note: This project will require background checks if any in-person contact with children is included.

Option 2: Upgrade Children’s Protective Services (CPS) Supervised Visitation Rooms—4 rooms

Children who have been removed from their parents for abuse or neglect almost always need to maintain a relationship with their parent(s), but it often needs to be in a supervised situation while the parents are taking their mandated anger management classes and participating in therapy—generally working to change their parenting behaviors. The CPS building on West Davis has 4 rooms dedicated to this purpose. These rooms should be bright and happy for the children, full of age-appropriate toys and sensory stimulation devices. They should have walls that are painted in happy colors, and furniture that is solid, but conducive to child/parent visits.

Although these are CPS rooms, not CASA rooms, we have permission from CPS to work with you to redecorate these rooms if you pick this project. Our CASA volunteers are in and out of these rooms frequently to observe the interactions between the children and parents—and more than one volunteer has asked us to do something about these rooms!

Currently 2 of the rooms are in quite bad shape, and 2 rooms are in mediocre shape. The furniture and chairs are old, the toys are beat up and unimaginative, and the paint is dismal. Currently all toys and fabrics have been removed from the rooms because of COVID, however, this will change over time. The decorating decisions will need to be made considering our new attention to the possibility of contagion. You could renovate two, or all four of the rooms.

It would be GREAT for visiting parents to have a bright, cheerful place to see their children.

Timing: Can be finished before your April timeline

CASA Project Liaison: Marilyn McQueeney, CASA Program Director

Projected Cost: Paint, furniture, toys. You could possibly work with Angel Reach, whose store the LMC team renovated last year, for these materials.

Community Benefit: will help families who are working to change their parenting behaviors to make progress in behaving in loving and productive ways with their children.

Option 3: Web page of resource manual for our volunteers

We are currently working on a resource manual for our volunteers. We would ideally prefer to have the resource manual created as an easily searchable database page for our website. Volunteers would be able to find and access resource information by typing in searchable keywords. The project could include expanding the resources available by exploring additional community resources. This is a good project for a team who needs to continue socially isolating.

Timing: Can be completed before the April timeline

CASA Project Liaison: Alli Stephens

Projected Cost: None that we are aware of

Community Benefit: will help our volunteers to serve children better, by helping them find ways to use all the resources that are already available in our community but may not be known to CASA, or to the individual volunteers.

Option 4: Disaster Recovery Assessment and Plan

Write a disaster recovery assessment and plan for CASA, considering all the things that might go wrong—what we SHOULD do about them, how prepared we are now, and what changes we need to make. This could include an IT security audit, and the development of processes to keep CASA IT safe.

Timing: Can be completed before the April timeframe

CASA Project Liaison: Ann McAlpin

Projected Cost: No known costs

Community Benefit: will help our organization to be better prepared for potential disasters in the future.